



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
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AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

Paul R. LePage
GOVERNOR

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

June 17, 2016

Dear Mr. Vilsack:

I am in receipt of a letter from the director of your Retailer Policy and Management Division, Andrea Gold, dated June 8, 2016, denying Maine's request of a waiver to undertake a demonstration project to prohibit the purchase of candy and sugar-sweetened beverages with food stamp benefits in Maine.

Your agency states several concerns with the demonstration proposal and I am not naïve enough to think there is a path to addressing those concerns to your satisfaction. However, prohibiting the purchase of junk food with public benefits is such a commonsense proposition that a demonstration project should not even be necessary.

Your insincere posture is exemplified by the letter's snide closing sentences, which state that Maine should focus on its food stamp error rate instead of ensuring those benefits are buying healthy foods. According to your own website, Maine's food stamp error rate is actually more than 30 percent *lower* than the national average and I can only conclude that is why you cite one-sided articles from Maine's liberal media as your source instead of referring to your own data. Shameful.

The Obama Administration goes to great lengths to police the menus of K-12 cafeterias but looks the other way as billions of taxpayer dollars finance a steady diet of Mars bars and Mountain Dew. I can think of only one reason why the federal government would refuse to eliminate junk food from the EBT menu: special interests. Only when Washington politicians stop kowtowing to powerful retail grocer and junk food manufacturing interests will American taxpayers have a respectable food safety net.

Meanwhile, Maine's obesity rate has doubled in the past twenty years from 14 to 28 percent and our incidence of diabetes has more than doubled, from 3.9 to 9.5 percent. Only 31 percent of Mainers eat the recommended amount of vegetables and only 36 percent eat the recommended amount of fruits daily. To compound the problem, in most cases we are paying for the consequences of these disturbing trends because most SNAP recipients also receive Medicaid.

Beyond the health effects of the federal government's corrupt food stamp policy is the tragedy of billions in wasted taxpayer dollars that buy candy and soda through a program that was



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originally designed to reduce hunger. Maine taxpayers see it every day at the grocery store and they are sick and tired of watching their hard-earned money going down the drain.

It's time for the federal government to wake up and smell the energy drinks. Doubtful that it will, I will be pursuing options to implement reform unilaterally or cease Maine's administration of the food stamp program altogether. You maintain such a broken program that I do not want my name attached to it. I suggest you start browsing the Maine classifieds for commercial real estate leases.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul R. LePage". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "L".

Paul R. LePage
Governor